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AUTHOR Loacker, S. Georgine
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ABSTRACT

The rationale and procedures for assessing students' oral communication skills at Alverno College (Milwaukee, Wisconsin) are outlined in this paper. Since the curriculum at Alverno emphasizes ongoing performance assessment as an integral part of the learning process and as an effective measurement of educational progress, the discussion focuses on the six levels or stages specified for each ability required for graduation from Alverno. Six levels of oral communication ability are listed and discussed: (1) assessing one's own speaking ability, (2) speaking with analytic consciousness, (3) speaking effectively (advanced training), (4) integrating effective speaking within the framework of academic disciplines, (5) integrating theory with effective speaking, and (6) speaking effectively within a multimedia context and with advanced content. For each of these performance levels, learning objectives and evaluation criteria and methods are offered. Excerpts from publications by Alverno faculty are attached to indicate the general context for developing and assessing oral communication skills at the college. (RL)

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S. Georgine Loacker
Division of Communications
Alverno College
Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53215

Alverno College's Program in Developing and Assessing Oral Communication Skills
(Section of Panel on: Assessing Basic Speech Communications Skills at the College and University Level)

For the learner at Alverno College, assessment means not only a method of evaluating but a key way of learning. As faculty, we aim to enable each learner to use assessment as a means of gaining insight into her abilities and direction for further learning. Self assessment, as well as assessment by faculty and peers, operates at the core of her struggle to become an independent lifelong learner.

Alverno's emphasis on performance assessment comes from the fact that students progress in the educational program and receive their degree on the basis of demonstrated competences or complexes of interwoven abilities.[1] The assessment process verifies their achievement.

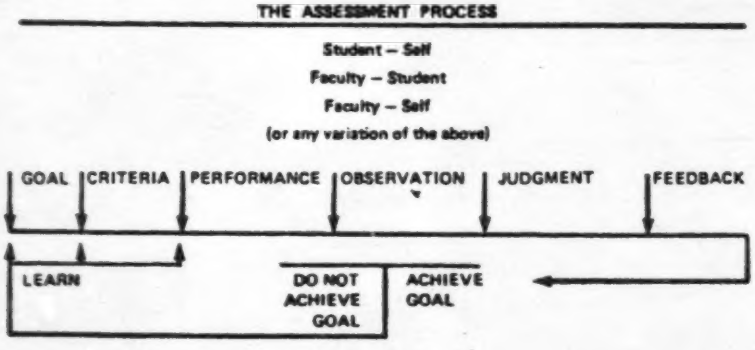
Like other learning outcomes required for the Alverno graduate, speaking becomes an ongoing process within her academic development. Many of her instructors, from introductory to advanced courses, have her speak about what and how she is learning, to the class and to other audiences. These instructors provide assessment and feedback to assist her in continually refining her speaking ability.

Several key principles inform the process:

We as faculty believe that a generic ability like speaking involves doing what one knows. Therefore we ask the learner to speak and the assessor to sample her speaking.

We believe that knowing criteria assists one both to perform and to judge performance. Therefore we make criteria explicit for both learner and assessor.

The process proceeding from these principles, when generalized, looks like this from an assessment perspective:



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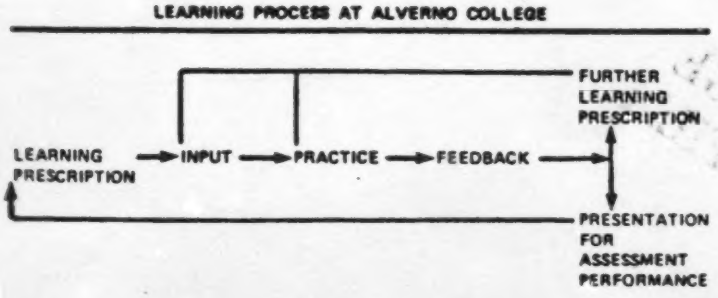
From a learning perspective the process, generalized, looks like this:



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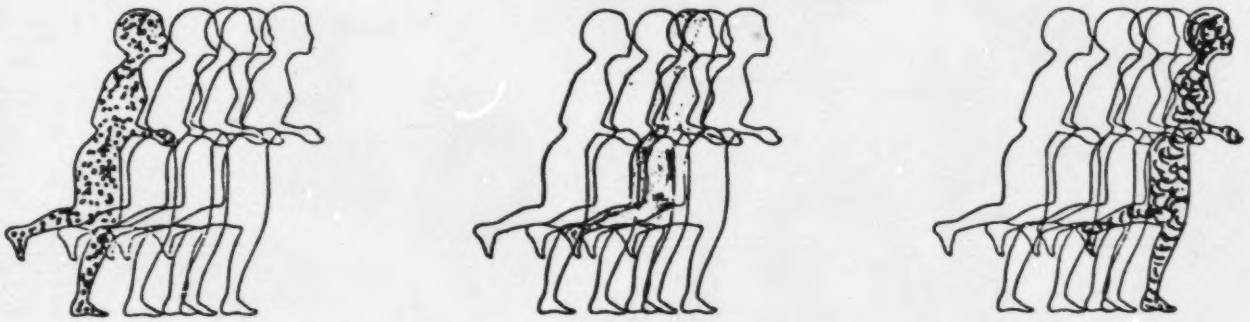
These diagrams both suggest that assessment evaluates learning after the learning has taken place. However, the second one also shows how assessment is a component within learning. The "practice/feedback" components suggest that assessment — here formative or diagnostic — is internal to the learning.

One more operating principle explains the infusion of speaking development and assessment throughout the Alverno curriculum:

> We believe that the complexity of ability in an individual goes beyond a single act. Therefore our students develop speaking ability and have it assessed in multiple modes and contexts.



SAMPLING IN MULTIPLE MODES AND CONTEXTS

These multiple contexts involve the student's general education courses as well as her major and minor.

To learn for life, she speaks in situations that relate to what life requires — perhaps to persuade interested citizens or disinterested scholars. To become a lifelong learner, she participates in experiences designed to assist her to gradually internalize criteria and learn to apply them to her own speaking about management principles, literature, or computer technology.

The Alverno student progresses, and is assessed and credited for her progress, on the basis of six levels or stages specified for each ability required for graduation. For speaking, these levels — with assessment and learning strategies indicated — are:

(Diagram on following page)

LEVEL	LEARNING	ASSESSMENT
ONE: SELF ASSESSING ONE'S SPEAKING	.One lecture-demonstration on self assessment of speaking .One extended feedback session	One performance in Assessment Center: .Speaking sample videotaped .Self assessment with detailed criteria
TWO: SPEAKING WITH ANALYTIC CONSCIOUSNESS	A one-semester hour course in speaking that lasts as long as necessary	Ongoing performance in introductory speaking course
THREE: SPEAKING EFFECTIVELY	Advanced speaking lab supplementing ongoing performance in "content" courses	.Ongoing performance in specified "content" courses .Co-assessment with speaking assessor for 1-3 speeches
FOUR: INTEGRATING EFFECTIVE SPEAKING WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF ACADEMIC DISCIPLINES GENERAL EDUCATION ↑	Advanced speaking lab on basis of need, supplementing ongoing performance in "content" courses	.Ongoing performance in varied "content" courses .Co-assessment with speaking assessor in one multicommunications assessment
SPECIALIZED EDUCATION ↓ FIVE: INTEGRATING THEORY WITH EFFECTIVE SPEAKING	Advanced speaking on basis of need, supplementing ongoing performance	Integrated into assessment of abilities associated with major
SIX: SPEAKING EFFECTIVELY WITHIN A MULTIMEDIA CONTEXT AND ADVANCED CONTENT		

LEVEL ONE

Before a student begins her first semester at Alverno, she takes the first of a two-part speaking assessment which is some form of the following:

Alverno College Assessment Center

C1L1: SPEAKING/MEDIA (FORM a) — Part I
(Recommended time — 1 hour)

"Should college be open to anyone who wants to try it or should there be some criteria operative to screen students before they enter college?" Take a position on either side of this question and prepare a 3-5 minute speech to convince an audience of the worth of your position.

Your audience will be a group of high school students who are looking into their own futures. Use specific instances from experience and observation to support your ideas and clarify them for this audience.

Spend about 5 minutes going over the above paragraph so that you have a clear picture of the kind of speech you are asked to give.

Take about 15 more minutes to prepare your speech. Then present it to the audience provided, as if they were a high school assembly. Although you may use notes, your task is to give a speech, not read a paper. A videotape operator will tape your presentation so that you can see it to judge your own strengths and weaknesses.

* * *

After you have your notes organized and are ready to do your speaking, prepare a visual aid to incorporate into your presentation. It can be a diagram or mini outline or any other kind of illustration. It should assist you to make your point and assist the audience to understand your message.

Use the newsprint and pen provided. Take the finished product along to the video studio.

A paraprofessional assessor views the student's videotaped performance, records her observations, and makes a judgment on each of a series of criteria like CLEAR ARTICULATION and ORGANIZATION.

During orientation week of her first semester, the student attends a lecture demonstration on understanding and applying criteria to her own performance. She then takes the second part of her speaking assessment, which requires her to assess her own videotaped speaking sample. To develop a basis for judging her performance on each criterion, she makes carefully guided observations like the following:

5. ORGANIZATION

a. Would an audience find a clear statement of direction and purpose near the beginning of my speech?

_____ yes, for example _____
_____ no
_____ no, but I use a deliberate technique of suspense that would not confuse the reader

b. Did I relate the points I made throughout back to the focal idea?

_____ yes, consistently _____
(examples)

_____ occasionally _____
(examples)

_____ no

c. Did I lead my audience from one part of my speech to the next with words and phrases that made the connection between ideas clear?

_____ yes, for example _____
_____ no

d. Did I end with finality (i.e., clinch my argument, summarize or reassert, or propose some option or solution)?

_____ yes, for example _____
_____ no

Therefore I would rate my speech for ORGANIZATION: (Circle number)

Generally unclear organization — 1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — Generally clear organization

After a student has accomplished an initial self assessment, she meets with an Assessment Center staff member for detailed feedback. With the self assessment information and the trained assessor's observations in hand, the student works with the staff member to determine her strengths and weaknesses and develop an appropriate learning plan.

LEVEL TWO

Assessment at level two takes place in the context of a course in introductory speaking strategies. Through faculty, peer, and self evaluation of sequenced performances, videotaped in a supportive atmosphere, the student develops her

speaking ability to a point at which the instructor judges her ready to continue refining it independently with laboratory assistance where helpful. Thus the course, although recorded as one semester hour, may last anywhere from a few weeks to a few semesters. For some students it is supplemented by experiences designed to provide special assistance in overcoming apprehension.

With continued emphasis on self assessment as essential to independence, the speaking instructor assists the student to internalize and apply criteria specified in levels for use throughout the institution. For example, she learns to observe behavioral indicators to support her judgment on criteria like the following:

REACHING AUDIENCE through SUPPORT/DEVELOPMENT	
Level 1	Shows ability to use examples and/or evidence meaningful to audience
Level 2	Supports most generalizations with examples and/or evidence meaningful to audience
Level 3	Uses adequate development for clarification of message
Level 4	Uses development of adequate length and variety and of sufficient interest to convince audience of wortn of message

In order to make the criteria concrete, realistic, and credible in relation to individual style for the student, the Communications Division has created a series of videotapes to replace a textbook for this introductory course. These videotapes incorporate multiple student samples that represent varied styles and qualitative differences.

LEVEL THREE

Speaking assessment at level three occurs within the context of a course in some discipline, like history or biology, in which the instructor has agreed to have the student demonstrate speaking ability. When she contracts to do it in that course, she is also assigned a speaking laboratory instructor to assist her when necessary or helpful.

That speaking instructor also becomes co-assessor with her course instructor in evaluating at least one of her speaking performances in that course. The criteria applied are the ones that are operative throughout the institution.

The following examples suggest the kinds of stimuli one might find in various disciplines:

English: Your audience is the Better Business Bureau's Committee on Religious Fraud. Using observations and reasonable inferences from Bernard Malamud's story, "The Silver Crown," EITHER (a) accuse the rabbi of fraud or (b) defend the rabbi as sincere in what he offers. (Time: 4 minutes)

Psychology: Your audience is a licensing board group of psychologists. This is one of your exams for licensing. You are to read the accompanying case study and the psychological theory presented to explain it. You must convince the group that you know theories

well enough that you can explain case data in terms of more than one theory. Analyze the case in terms of a theory other than the one presented. Decide which of the two you prefer and try to show how your preferred theory better explains the facts of the case. You will have 5 minutes to convince the experts.

LEVEL FOUR

Speaking assessment at level four also occurs within the context of regular courses. The individual course instructor assesses the student's speaking performances, applying institution-wide criteria adapted to that course or discipline.

At some point, the student must contract for a multicommunications assessment which is co-assessed by an assessor from a discipline of her choice and a communications assessor. In the assessment, she must communicate what she knows and can do with some concept basic to the selected discipline. She participates in a simulation which requires her to give an oral presentation (including the use of media) to a novice or intermediate audience, to write a letter to a specified audience to explain an aspect of the concept, and to respond to and incorporate ideas from a lecture and a written work on topics related to the concept.

This level of speaking is the last one for which the student receives separate credit as a requirement of her general education. After that, speaking assessment is integrated into advanced assessments of the abilities required by her major and minor. For this level and beyond it, the student can contract for assistance in the speaking laboratories.

LEVELS FIVE AND SIX

For some students, communications ability, including speaking, becomes an aspect of specialization within some majors like education. In that case, for level five, they build a portfolio of evaluation records of their performances on and off campus and demonstrate through their self evaluation a developing integration of communications theory and speaking practice. At level six, they design and execute multimedia projects that demonstrate the relation between their style of thinking within a specific discipline and their style of communication.

* * *

Clearly some areas of an assessment process like this one raise questions and challenges of particular interest:

1. Development of Criteria: The Communications Division had originally specified criteria out of their common experience of evaluating speaking performance throughout their teaching careers. For the past eight years they have continually revised these criteria by collecting and studying student samples.

2. Record of Student Performance: Each student's speaking performances are recorded on her individual videotape which is kept in the Assessment Center as a dynamic account of her progress. These tapes provide an opportunity for self assessment and continued learning. They are also a source of student samples for the faculty to concretely clarify criteria for the students and for each other.

3. Training of Assessors: Both the paraprofessionals who assess speaking performance at level one and the faculty who do so at other levels require training. Their training program consists of one session each semester. For the faculty, this is supplemented by the experience of co-assessment with a speaking expert. Initially, the trained paraprofessionals co-assessed with each other. However, a validation study of inter-rater reliability in 1976[2] showed correlations and reliability coefficients sufficiently high to justify assessment by a single, carefully trained paraprofessional assessor.

4. Assurance of Quality: In addition to training, the Communications Division does a systematic sampling and evaluation of speaking assessments at least every three years.

* * *

Across the board, we now have data to support a considerable level of change in the demonstrated speaking ability of our students. However, in order to improve and expand our teaching strategies we need to do discriminatory studies of that data. What criteria do students tend to meet as a result of evaluating their videotaped performances? What learning strategies work best to develop the skills inherent in other criteria? What more sophisticated communications skills are required to accommodate more advanced thinking in a discipline? How can we further refine our criteria? These are only a few of the questions we would do well to pursue. And we need the response and questioning of our colleagues to do so effectively.

Notes

[1]The attached appendices — excerpts from publications by Alverno faculty — suggest the general context for developing and assessing oral communications skills at Alverno. Although this paper focuses on speaking, the principles and process apply to listening and interactive skills as well — and, indeed, to all the abilities required for an Alverno degree.

[2]Loacker, Georgine. "A Reliability Study of Expert Judgment in the Assessment of Speaking Performance of Entering College Students." The CAEL Validation Report. Edited by Warren W. Willingham and Associates. Maryland: Cooperative Assessment of Experiential Learning, 1976.

APPENDICES

Assessment at Alverno College

We have made a major commitment to assessment at Alverno College. We are committed to assess what is being taught in every course in our curriculum. Indeed, we consider the assessment techniques and criteria as important as the topics and texts of the courses. We are also committed to assessing student competence outside the classroom. The Assessment Center, with a full-time staff and dozens of trained campus and outside assessors, administers external assessments and evaluative feedback to students throughout the school year.

This all came about as a direct result of our effort to define and bring into being a fundamentally new approach to the age-old task of liberal education. We began this effort a decade ago, in the late 1960s, when serious questions were surfacing nationwide about the meaning and value of college and of liberal education in particular. At Alverno, these questions combined with our need to redefine our mission as a small, urban Catholic liberal arts college for women. The result was a deep and serious inquiry into our goals and values as educators.

After two years of special seminars, faculty institutes, student-faculty commissions and college-wide forums, our inquiry took more definite shape in a series of questions our president asked the academic departments in 1970-71:

- **"What kinds of questions are being asked by professionals in your field that relate to the validity of your discipline in a total college program?"**
- **"What is your department's position on these?"**
- **"How are you dealing with these problems in your general education courses, and in the work for a major in your field?"**
- **"What are you teaching that is so important that students cannot afford to pass up courses in your department?"**

During the ensuing year of rationale presentations by each of the departments, the faculty reached a consensus that outcomes for the student are the demonstrable value of any learning experience. "What kind of person," we then asked "are we as educators seeking to develop? What outcomes or characteristics will she need as a part of her life?" In response to this question we developed the framework of a series of eight general abilities which, taken together, would result from a successful liberal education.

These are:

1. **Effective communications ability**
2. **Analytical capability**
3. **Problem solving ability**
4. **Valuing in a decision making context**
5. **Effective social interaction**
6. **Effectiveness in individual/environment relationships**
7. **Responsible involvement in the contemporary world**
8. **Aesthetic responsiveness**

No one of these, we realized, could be taught or learned directly in a single experience. Nor could they be divorced from the liberal arts curriculum of which they are the outcomes. The faculty therefore eventually analyzed each of these abilities — which we called "competences" — into a sequence of six levels at which the student would be expected to demonstrate her ability as she progressed through the undergraduate curriculum.

We identified these levels by examining the existing curriculum in each of our disciplines. Traditionally, each department had described its curriculum as a structure of *knowledge*, beginning with basic general concepts and progressing toward more complex and specialized studies. This time, we worked from the assumption that there is also a progression of *abilities* implicit in the movement from introductory survey to advanced seminar. Our focus, then, was to discern the developmental patterns already embedded in the normal curriculum of our disciplines, rather than to redefine our fields or to create a whole new curricular structure.

After we had identified these competences and their sequential levels, the question became: "How can we tell how far along a student is in developing these competences?" It would be pointless, we realized, to have spent so much time and effort articulating our educational goals unless we were willing to make a similar investment in assessing their attainment. Thus we arrived at assessment as a natural and crucial part of our approach to liberal education.

Alverno College
3401 S. 39th St. / Milwaukee, WI 53215

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ASSESSMENT AT ALVERNO COLLEGE

We have made a major commitment to assessment at Alverno College. Indeed, we consider the assessment techniques and criteria as important as the topics and texts of our courses. We are also committed to assessing student competence out of the classroom. *Assessment at Alverno is a systematic, creative process which begins by clearly defining student outcomes.* We began this effort in the late 1960's, when our faculty reached a consensus that what a student actually knows or is able to do is the heart of any learning experience. We developed a framework of eight general abilities which, taken together, would define the outcomes of a successful liberal education.

How to Design Assessment

Each semester, faculty members and departments work to make explicit the abilities from among the eight general abilities that are implicit outcomes of their courses, to turn them into something concrete and observable a student can be asked to do. After several years, we have identified an underlying principle that supports our successful approaches: Begin by being as clear as possible about outcomes. And we have designed a process to do that.

An instructor planning an introductory literature course, for example, might well identify "Analysis" as a crucial ability. In the poetry section, she knows that one or two overzealous students will normally hunt for "hidden meanings" while others who "just can't see all that in a poem" conclude that they had better forget about poetry. She might therefore wish to get the class into the habit of looking carefully at a poem before asking anything at all about its meaning. Such a goal fits the Alverno faculty's definition of the first level of analysis, "to observe."

How does the instructor design an assessment for this ability? She begins by trying to break out the various elements of observing. What does a person who observes a poem well do? The instructor might arrive at a list of components like this: "distinguish what's stated from what's implied; identify major features that make the work what it is; distinguish important parts; see what's there; see what you are supposed to be looking for." As she sets priorities among these components, the instructor begins moving into the design of the assessment instrument as well.

Let us assume that the instructor has selected Robert Frost's "In Hardwood Groves," for use in the assessment. Her instrument design could consist of a single class hour in which each student is given a copy of the poem and a set of instructions for a two-part exercise. The first part might ask the student to spend 30 minutes reading the poem, writing an exact account of the things and events described, and indicating the speaker's attitude, giving evidence of how she determines it. The second half hour might involve the student in small group work, comparing notes.

The instructor then sets criteria by which to judge student responses, an imposing task which has been made far simpler by defining a concrete assessment situation. If the student can indeed "see what's there," a top priority at this initial level, then the elements she identifies will include most or all of those verifiable from the poem's

text--e.g., leaves, trees, the earth, flowers, the leather glove of the simile. Her ability to "distinguish the important parts" can be judged by checking to see that her description includes the major elements, however many others she may also identify. How well she can "distinguish what's obvious from what's implied" will surface in whether or not she lists implied elements--and whether or not she notes them as such. Asking for evidence of the speaker's attitude also elicits this ability.

Having administered the assessment, the instructor would record her judgments according to the criteria and arrange for some form of feedback to the student--written remarks, perhaps accompanied by an in-class review of the assessment for the whole group or by individual conferences, depending on how much of the course she wants to devote to this particular learning experience. Evaluation and redesign would occur a number of ways. The instructor herself would weigh how well the instrument elicited "observing behavior" and challenged students to *develop* their awareness and abilities as observers. She would probably also share the assessment and its results with colleagues in the English department and in our Analysis Competence Division.

An assessment may appear little changed from what students had formerly been asked to do on a familiar exercise. Or it may involve days of effort on the students' part in complex and innovative activities. What distinguishes even the simplest, most familiar assessment, however, is the presence of the specific component abilities being sought and the criteria according to which the student's performance will be judged. Equally important, the student's learning experiences prior to the assessment have been planned to foster those same abilities. And she has known from the outset what methods and criteria would be used in the assessment and why.

Whether it is simple and familiar or complex and innovative, whether it takes part of a classroom hour or most of three days in a TV-radio studio or on a nursing home ward, each assessment requires the participation of one or more trained assessors--many from the community. The assessor carefully observes and records the student's performance, noting illustrative examples. The assessor judges whether the criteria were adequately demonstrated and either gives the student individual feedback or prepares a detailed analysis from which others (perhaps the course instructor) may do so.

Assessment at Alverno has become, we believe, a more consistently reliable process. Students get the benefit of many sources of feedback, frequent assessment opportunities, and different types of assessment strategies. Faculty receive feedback from colleagues on their assessment designs and institutional support for implementing them.

The Alverno College Faculty

For further information contact Dr. Georgine Loacker, at the Communications Division, Alverno College, 3401 S. 39th Street, Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53215.

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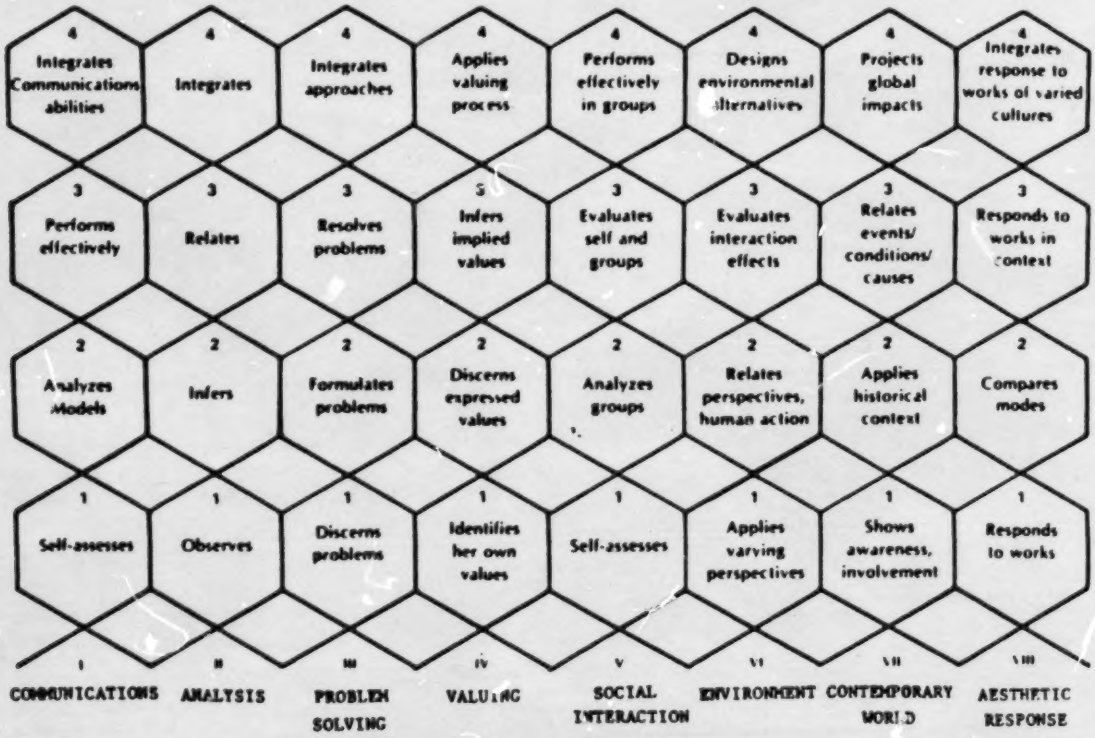
GENERAL AND UPPER-LEVEL COMPETENCE UNITS FOR WEEKEND COLLEGE

This matrix outlines the general education levels for each of the eight competences. All students are required to complete each competence at all four developmental levels (equaling 32 competence level units).



In addition, each student completes a total of eight advanced levels in selected competences for their major and support areas. This fulfills the requirement for a baccalaureate program (40 competence level units).

1. Communications

Communications as a required competence in the Alverno learning program focuses on sustained presentation of messages by the student as sender, and on response by the student as receiver of a variety of presentations.

A student develops the ability to make clear and forceful presentations of any message she sends, with and without the aid of graphed data, visuals and electronic media. She also learns to take in such presentations – even if they lack clarity and force – so that she can make meaning from them in relation to her thinking and her life.

Preparing students to present an extended message has classically focused on forms. We have tried to focus the Alverno Communications Competence on a process– the process of making connections between a presenter and an audience.

The competent communicator habitually makes such connections. She can adapt a message to an audience, and she can act as an involved and analytic audience herself. She recognizes innumerable instances in life that require this ability to "make meaning" --whether the setting is a TV program, a classroom, a business organization, or a neighborhood group.

The criteria of effectiveness in this process are all based on *clarification* and *involvement*. When the student developing her communications competence speaks, writes, graphs, or presents in mixed media, she must clarify her message for an audience and use means to involve them in it. Reading, listening to, or interpreting a presentation, she must clarify the sense of the message for herself and involve herself with it.

How do students learn to clarify meaning and to involve others or themselves as audiences?

Besides offering classroom instruction and practice, communications teachers require each student to look among her ongoing experiences- with peers, parents, college personnel, employers, in textbooks, newspapers, letters–for situations that demand connections between presenter and audience. In each situation, she learns to present ideas and convictions in terms of her own experience and to involve the experience of the audience as far as possible.

As audience, she learns to assume the same kind of responsibility. She practices taking in presentations accurately, translating them into her own experience, relating them to her own idea, confronting them with her own values and convictions, and examining them for limits, implications, and possible applications.

The process by which the Alverno student develops her competence in communications begins by establishing a base where she is. It builds consistently on that base, extending into something new at each of the six levels.

Throughout the process, the abilities developed are speaking, writing, reading, and listening, with the supplementary skills of graph making and illustrating through media. These abilities are separated from other aspects of communication (such as interpersonal skills, which make up a whole separate competence) to allow enough emphasis on each for fruitful development.

The consistent building of these abilities moves from self-assessment into consciousness of the process of communication and its effects, then toward effective independent performance with increasingly complex content. The student at advanced levels develops an interiorized theory to undergird her communications activities, and applies that theory to effective presentations using electronic and other media.

At all levels, the student demonstrates her developing competence in two distinct roles –initiator/presenter and responder/audience. She does so before an instructor/assessor, or a team of assessors, who evaluate her performance using the same criteria she has learned to apply.

General Competence: Levels 1-4

Level 1 of the Communications Competence starts the student on a track of *self-assessment* toward more effective performance. She has done speaking, writing, reading, listening, and some computing before she came to college. Now she exercises each of these in situations involving explanation and/or persuasion based on non-technical information. In the process she learns to isolate and analyze her strengths and weaknesses, so she can consciously work at development and can understand her own successes enough to repeat them.

At Level 2 the student works to increase her understanding of the strengths and weaknesses she has discovered. She becomes aware of her own writing process and its potential. She uses it repeatedly to learn how to overcome its limitations. She *analyzes models* both written and oral. In doing so, she consciously practices listening, reading, and interpreting quantitative data.

She learns to make distinctions among audiences: How does a popular audience affect the way she might talk about her college education? What kind of letter does she write to a professional person whose aid she wishes to enlist? While learning to adapt to varied audiences, she also begins directed observation of audio-visual techniques as they relate to effective speaking and listening.

The student at Levels 3 and 4 develops *effective performance* by building on her strengths and eliminating obstructive weaknesses. She puts into practice her growing understanding of effective communications and of herself as a communicator.

The topics she deals with at Level 3 are aspects of her studies which are sufficiently limited for her to understand them thoroughly. They are sufficiently complex, however, that she must combine her growing communications skills with her abilities in other competence areas—analysis, synthesis, and application.

She performs as a speaker, writer, and grapher of information. In a speaking situation, she shows that she can use graphs and other simple visuals effectively. She shows that she can analytically listen to and read verbal communications and graphs. And in listening, she shows that she understands the effect of more complex media on the presentation of information.

At Level 4 the student continues her development by working with increasingly *complex content*. Here each situation involves clarifying basic concepts, like biological adaptation or civil rights, from three different areas of knowledge. In a situation that integrates all her communication abilities, she demonstrates ability to adapt her message to a variety of audiences and purposes.

Specialized Competence: Levels 5-6

The student develops these levels of the Communications Competence within the context of her Area of Concentration, such as religious studies or education. She has already studied model performances, and has effectively performed on several occasions as a speaker, a writer, a listener, a reader, and a maker and reader of graphs and other visual media.

With this background, she now studies communications theory at Level 5, and begins to interiorize some integrating concepts. She develops a theoretical understanding of several aspects of meaning and form. She learns how and why some things clarify while others confuse. She learns which aspects in a communications encounter work to involve the audience and which tend to dissociate them. She must then apply these understandings in responding to presentations, and in planning and executing them.

At Level 6 the student develops her ability to respond to her audience, in different situations related to her discipline or profession, with an integrated presentation of an extended message. She addresses a variety of audiences, each for a different purpose.

She learns to integrate the use of media in her presentations. Although she need not become a photographer or commercial artist, she does learn how and where to acquire good photographic, cassette, film or other software. And she learns to make them work smoothly and effectively for clarifying her message and involving her audience.

In a variety of instances, the student at this level is asked to explain how her written, oral, and mixed media presentations relate to theory. Specifically, she is asked how individual choices she has made in creating a performance relate to audience and purpose, and how they promote clarification and involvement.

The student who achieves Level 6 competence has developed an understanding of how meaning is made from experience in the process of communicating. She has cultivated a repertoire of abilities with which to contribute to the making of meaning in her society.

General Competence: Levels 1-4

Level 1 of the Communications Competence starts the student on a track of *self-assessment* toward more effective performance. She has done speaking, writing, reading, listening, and some computing before she came to college. Now she exercises each of these in situations involving explanation and/or persuasion based on non-technical information. In the process she learns to isolate and analyze her strengths and weaknesses, so she can consciously work at development and can understand her own successes enough to repeat them.

At Level 2 the student works to increase her understanding of the strengths and weaknesses she has discovered. She becomes aware of her own writing process and its potential. She uses it repeatedly to learn how to overcome its limitations. She *analyzes models* both written and oral. In doing so, she consciously practices listening, reading, and interpreting quantitative data.

She learns to make distinctions among audiences: How does a popular audience affect the way she might talk about her college education? What kind of letter does she write to a professional person whose aid she wishes to enlist? While learning to adapt to varied audiences, she also begins directed observation of audio-visual techniques as they relate to effective speaking and listening.

The student at Levels 3 and 4 develops *effective performance* by building on her strengths and eliminating obstructive weaknesses. She puts into practice her growing understanding of effective communications and of herself as a communicator.

The topics she deals with at Level 3 are aspects of her studies which are sufficiently limited for her to understand them thoroughly. They are sufficiently complex, however, that she must combine her growing communications skills with her abilities in other competence areas—analysis, synthesis, and application.

She performs as a speaker, writer, and grapher of information. In a speaking situation, she shows that she can use graphs and other simple visuals effectively. She shows that she can analytically listen to and read verbal communications and graphs. And in listening, she shows that she understands the effect of more complex media on the presentation of information.

At Level 4 the student continues her development by working with increasingly *complex content*. Here each situation involves clarifying basic concepts, like biological adaptation or civil rights, from three different areas of knowledge. In a situation that integrates all her communication abilities, she demonstrates ability to adapt her message to a variety of audiences and purposes.

Specialized Competence: Levels 5-6

The student develops these levels of the Communications Competence within the context of her Area of Concentration, such as religious studies or education. She has already studied model performances, and has effectively performed on several occasions as a speaker, a writer, a listener, a reader, and a maker and reader of graphs and other visual media.

With this background, she now studies communications theory at Level 5, and begins to interiorize some integrating concepts. She develops a theoretical understanding of several aspects of meaning and form. She learns how and why some things clarify while others confuse. She learns which aspects in a communications encounter work to involve the audience and which tend to dissociate them. She must then apply these understandings in responding to presentations, and in planning and executing them.

At Level 6 the student develops her ability to respond to her audience, in different situations related to her discipline or profession, with an integrated presentation of an extended message. She addresses a variety of audiences, each for a different purpose.

She learns to integrate the use of media in her presentations. Although she need not become a photographer or commercial artist, she does learn how and where to acquire good photographic, cassette, film or other software. And she learns to make them work smoothly and effectively for clarifying her message and involving her audience.

In a variety of instances, the student at this level is asked to explain how her written, oral, and mixed media presentations relate to theory. Specifically, she is asked how individual choices she has made in creating a performance relate to audience and purpose, and how they promote clarification and involvement.

The student who achieves Level 6 competence has developed an understanding of how meaning is made from experience in the process of communicating. She has cultivated a repertoire of abilities with which to contribute to the making of meaning in her society.

5. Social Interaction

Competence in dealing with others is crucial to personal and professional success. A society that accomplishes the bulk of its work in consultation, discussion and debate, on committees and task forces, must depend heavily upon those members who can be effective in interpersonal situations.

Yet seldom since the Renaissance notion of the "gentleman" has the development of socially effective persons been an explicit focus of higher education. Particularly in the last two centuries, under the influence of the German university model, collegiate curricula have found social skills to be less and less amenable to development in the formal classroom context. As universal higher education intensifies the pressures of time and population upon teaching, the difficulties are magnified.

At the same time, however, a rapid coming of age in the behavioral disciplines has begun to offer tools and techniques for isolating, measuring and evaluating social interactions. These new resources, together with our situation as a small college, have encouraged the Alverno faculty to attempt defining a Social Interaction Competence as an integral part of the learning program.

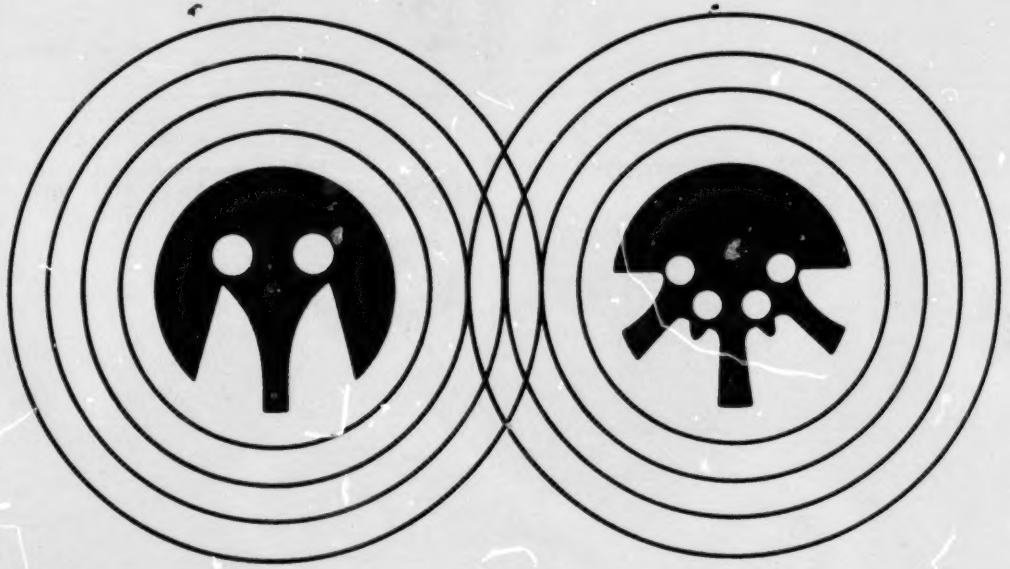
Effective social interaction, as defined at Alverno, is two-fold: interpersonal competence and competence in task oriented situations. Though the two overlap considerably, certain abilities characteristic of each have been distinguished for the purposes of learning and assessment.

The developmental sequence is guided by a pedagogic rationale similar to that in the Communications competence, with which it is closely allied. The student is brought to take an active role in the time-honored educational sequence--reflection-performance-critique--by entering at once into the performance phase.

This experiential plunge quickly focuses and makes explicit the diffuse and only partly apprehended elements of her own interpersonal behavior. With her own performance as a subject, the student begins developing her abilities to observe interactive patterns and to evaluate their effectiveness.

As this evaluation and reflection proceed, the student is given increasingly complex models and categories with which to frame her analysis and judgment. By the end of the required learning sequence, she returns to the intensive performance phase to demonstrate a variety of skills as an effective participant in both dyadic and group situations.

The student whose career plans call for an especially high degree of interactive competence may further extend her abilities in the advanced levels.



5. Social Interaction

General Competence: Levels 1-4

Level 1 initiates the student by requiring her to *observe and assess* her own behavior in a task oriented group. Initial group simulation exercises, and subsequent feedback sessions with an assessor, help her to identify and evaluate her interpersonal behavior patterns. These include her ability to perceive the effect on others of her verbal and non-verbal contributions, her ability to articulate her own goal in the situation and that of the group, and her ability to assume roles designed to help the group achieve its objectives.

With some first-hand experience observing and assessing interactive behavior, the student at Level 2 begins *analyzing* social behavior systematically. She learns theoretical frameworks for both interpersonal and task-oriented situations, employing them in live and videotaped seminar and laboratory sessions. In action and in reflection, she learns to focus her developing analytical sense upon the actions and interactions of others as well as herself.

Level 3 engages the student further in *evaluating* her growing interpersonal effectiveness. In her increasingly complex analysis of group processes, she learns to discern proximate and long-term goals, and to make objective judgments regarding the effectiveness of her own specific choices of behavior.

At Level 4, the student is required to demonstrate *effective behavior* in a variety of settings, according to criteria she and her assessors have agreed upon. The situations, both interpersonal and task-oriented, occur in settings which vary depending upon her academic and career directions.

She might take a panel discussion leader's role in a biology seminar, chair a student senate meeting, or interview a prospective field experience mentor. At this final required level, competence involves her theoretical skills in analyzing the situation and predicting outcomes, her actual performance capabilities, and the often laborious evaluative work of recording and reflection.

The student who has achieved competence at this level has reached a degree of interactive effectiveness that will ensure her continued successful involvement in various social contexts. She has also gained a perceptual and reflective sophistication that will enable her to approach increasingly complicated situations with confidence and skill.

Specialized Competence: Levels 5-6

Level 5 extends the student's operating range, by having her demonstrate her interaction skills during task oriented activities amid various cultures and subcultures.

In addition to the general criteria for effective interaction, the student at this level pays particular attention to her patterns of interaction with groups whose values, goals, and interactive norms differ from her own. She and her assessors look for evidence of her developing ability to respect other frameworks and styles, and to interact with habitual effectiveness with at least one group new to her experience.

These criteria will take shape differently, of course, for a student nurse working with a group of terminally ill patients than for a student artist leading a mural project in a minority area school.

Both Level 5 and Level 6 require consistency – the demonstration of competence over a period of time. At Level 6 this commitment of sustained effort is directed toward organizational activity, usually within her chosen area of specialization.

This level demands that the student take responsibility and initiative, and employ her theoretical awareness and active skills in leadership – enabling others to cooperate in perceiving and achieving their goals, both individually and in groups. She might work at this level as a nursing team leader, a student teacher, a staff analyst in a local firm or agency, or the facilitator of an on-campus student support group.

The student competent in all these areas of social interaction should leave college ready to participate effectively in any social environment she may enter. In friendship, family and counseling roles, in professional, civic and intercultural situations, she will have the demonstrated knowledge and practiced skill to contribute effectively.